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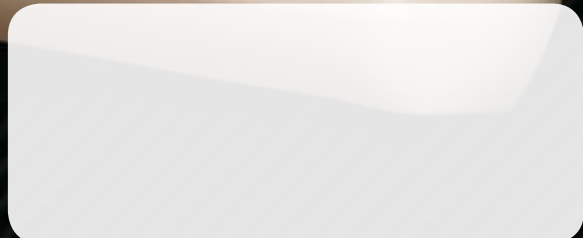
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Photos by Alistair Eagle

NOT TOO TIMID. NOT TOO BOLD.

Paralympic athletes Tyler Mosher and Michelle Stilwell share some insight on setting goals and fulfilling their dreams. **Words by Ben Hudson**

If you look in the mirror and ask yourself, “If I could do anything, what would I do?” what would you say? Would you say that you want to become an astronaut? How about a veterinarian? Or that you want to be rich or maybe just happy? Whatever it is, we all have dreams and we all have goals, yet so many people only talk about what they are going to do and daydream about “what could be.”

Every once in a while you come across people like Paralympic athletes Tyler Mosher and Michelle Stilwell – two people who, in the face of tremendous adversity, set seemingly impossible goals for themselves and achieve them. Tyler and Michelle have shown the world that anything is possible if you dream big, set goals, and believe in yourself. But how do they do it and where did they begin?

Michelle Stilwell is a wheelchair athlete

of remarkable skill. After crushing the competition on the track in the Beijing Paralympics and one year earlier breaking the world record for the 100-metres not once, but twice, Michelle concedes that things were, in her words “going pretty well for me.” But her relentless training regimen was taking its toll and she felt she needed a change – a new source of motivation and a new challenge. So after excelling in the shortest and fastest wheelchair race, she

chose to tackle the longest and most grueling event, the 42.2-kilometre marathon. With a clearly defined goal in mind she began training full force for the marathon.

So what’s the process an athlete like Michelle follows to set and achieve a goal as bold as competing in a marathon? The answer is surprising. All she needs to do is tell somebody. She explains, “For me, if I tell somebody that I am going to do something, then I have to do it. Verbalizing it, sets it in stone and I have to do it.” In her opinion, if you tell somebody you are going to do something and don’t, you are letting yourself down.

Michelle’s dream was to race in a wheelchair marathon but her goal for the race was comparatively modest. “All I wanted to do was finish,” she says. Michelle did more than finish. She smashed her goal and went on to beat a handful of men who were competing in the same event. But, she also describes her first effort as painful and grueling. “I was bruised, battered and blistered but I finished,” says Michelle.

Tyler Mosher is a Paralympic athlete with an equally impressive ability to set and achieve remarkable goals; however, his methodology couldn’t be more different from Michelle’s techniques. Tyler is a world champion adaptive snowboarder and he is currently ranked 26th in the world for disabled cross-country ski racing.

When asked about his dreams, goals and overall philosophy on life, Tyler speaks with little hesitation. “My life is about setting goals and then working to achieve them,” he says succinctly. After a snowboarding accident broke his back in nine places, Tyler was told he would never walk again. But he simply would not accept that prognosis for himself. He dreamt of walking again. He knew he could do it and believed in his abilities to make it happen. Before he had even left the hospital Tyler began to set small, incremental goals for himself that eventually led him out of the hospital and on with his life.

It should come as no surprise that Tyler

has learned to walk again and, although he worked extremely hard to make that happen, he concedes that he was also very lucky that his spinal injury was incomplete. After regaining 60% of his mobility, Tyler set his sights on competitive adaptive snowboarding. He also took up cross-country skiing as part of his training and rehabilitation. As Tyler’s skiing improved he began to plan for the future. He set a goal to make the national cross-country ski team and dreamed of being fast enough to compete in the Vancouver 2010 Paralympic Games. It seems that Tyler’s dream is going to come true.



Courtesy Cross Country Canada

While Michelle sets goals by verbalizing her intentions, Tyler adheres to a technique known as backcasting. Backcasting involves setting a big, but specific goal for some point in the distant future. Then with that clearly defined goal in place, Tyler sets smaller milestone goals in reverse chronological order until he has mapped out exactly how he will achieve the goal he has set.

Tyler’s current goal is to compete in the men’s Paralympic 10-kilometre cross-country race on March 18, 2010 followed by the sprint race on March 21, 2010. When Tyler first set those goals on December 15, 2003 (yes, he knows the exact date), he began the process of backcasting that looked something like this: To be ready for the Vancouver 2010 Winter Paralympics he needed to be winning races on the World Cup circuit in 2009. In 2008 he needed to make the National Team and settle into that level of competition, and so on and so on, until he had worked back to 2003. At the time of publishing this article, Tyler is well on course to fulfill his dream of competing in the 2010 Winter Paralympic Games.

To be successful you have to plan to be successful, but you also have to be prepared to falter and sometimes fail. “You’ve got to take that first step and then the next and then the next. You have to know that at some point you will fall and you need to be prepared when you do,” says Tyler. “The setbacks are what make success so sweet. But ultimately,” Tyler explains, “to make your dreams come true you need to set goals and believe in yourself.”



The Canadian Paralympic Committee (“the CPC”) is a non-profit, private organization with 43 member sports organizations dedicated to strengthening the Paralympic Movement. The CPC is responsible for creating an optimal high-performance environment for Canadian Paralympic athletes to win at Paralympic and ParaPanAmerican Games. By supporting Canadian Paralympic athletes and promoting their success, the CPC inspires all Canadians with a physical disability to get involved in sport through programs delivered by its member organizations. The Canadian Paralympic Committee is currently preparing for the Vancouver 2010 Paralympic Winter Games, taking place from March 12 – 21, 2010 and where 55 Canadian Paralympic athletes will compete in Para-Alpine skiing, Para-Nordic skiing (cross-country skiing and biathlon), sledge hockey and wheelchair curling. For more information, visit www.paralympic.ca